

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A computer program product, tangibly stored on a computer-readable medium, for facilitating communications among a group of partners including a first partner having a first communications protocol defining one or more first messages each including one or more first identifiers, and a second partner having a second communications protocol defining one or more second messages each including one or more second identifiers, the first and second protocols being different communications protocols, the product comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

identify a first data dictionary for the first partner, the first data dictionary containing one or more entries, each entry including one of the first identifiers and one or more attributes of the one of the first identifiers;

identify a second data dictionary for the second partner, the second data dictionary containing one or more entries, each entry including one of the second identifiers and one or more attributes of the one of the second identifiers;

select one of the entries in the first data dictionary;

compare the selected entry in the first data dictionary to each of the entries in the second data dictionary;

select an entry in the second data dictionary based on comparing; and

assign the selected entry in the first data dictionary to the selected entry in the second data dictionary.

2. The product of claim 1, wherein:

the communications protocol is an electronic commerce protocol.

3. The product of claim 2, wherein:

an attribute in each entry describes the relationship between the identifier in the entry and other identifiers in the data dictionary containing that entry.

4. The product of claim 3, wherein:

instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to compare include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign a normalized term to the

selected entry in the first data dictionary when no normalized term has been previously assigned to the selected entry in the first data dictionary; and

instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign the selected entry include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign the normalized
5 term to the entry selected in the second data dictionary.

5. The product of claim 4, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

create a mapping file describing the assignments between the entries in the first data
10 dictionary and the entries in the second data dictionary; and
send the mapping file to the first and second partners.

6. The product of claim 5, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

15 receive a message from one of the first and second partners; and
selectively send the message to the other of the first and second partners based on the terms of a partner agreement, the terms describing the conditions under which messages may be exchanged between the first and second partners.

20 7. The product of claim 5, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

receive a message from one of the first and second partners, the message requiring concatenation with a further message to produce the equivalent of a message for the other of the first and second partners;

25 store the message until the further message is received;
concatenate the message and the further message; and
send the concatenated message to the other of the first and second partners.

30 8. The product of claim 4, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

receive a message from one of the first and second partners;

translate the message from the protocol of the one of the first and second partners to the protocol of the other of the of the first and second partners based on the assignments between the entries in the first data dictionary and the entries in the second data dictionary; and

5 send the translated message to the other of the first and second partners.

9. The product of claim 8, wherein instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to send comprise instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

10 selectively send the message based on the terms of a partner agreement, the terms describing the conditions under which messages may be exchanged between the first and second partners.

10. The product of claim 4, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

 receive a message from one of the first and second partners, the message requiring concatenation with a further message to produce the equivalent of a message for the other of the first and second partners;

 store the message until the further message is received;

20 concatenate the message and the further message; and

 send the concatenated message to the other of the first and second partners.

11. An apparatus for facilitating communications among a group of partners including a first partner having a first communications protocol defining one or more first messages each including one or more first identifiers, and a second partner having a second communications protocol defining one or more second messages each including one or more second identifiers, the first and second protocols being different communications protocols, the apparatus comprising:

 means for identifying a first data dictionary for the first partner, the first data dictionary containing one or more entries, each entry including one of the first identifiers and one or more attributes of the one of the first identifiers;

means for identifying a second data dictionary for the second partner, the second data dictionary containing one or more entries, each entry including one of the second identifiers and one or more attributes of the one of the second identifiers;

means for selecting one of the entries in the first data dictionary;

5 means for comparing the selected entry in the first data dictionary to each of the entries in the second data dictionary;

means for selecting an entry in the second data dictionary based on comparing; and

means for assigning the selected entry in the first data dictionary to the selected entry in the second data dictionary.

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12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein:

the communications protocol is an electronic commerce protocol.

13. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein:

15 an attribute in each entry describes the relationship between the identifier in the entry and other identifiers in the data dictionary containing that entry.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein:

20 means for comparing includes means for assigning a normalized term to the selected entry in the first data dictionary when no normalized term has been previously assigned to the selected entry in the first data dictionary; and

means for assigning includes means for assigning the normalized term to the entry selected in the second data dictionary.

25 15. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising:

means for creating a mapping file describing the assignments between the entries in the first data dictionary and the entries in the second data dictionary; and

means for sending the mapping file to the first and second partners.

30 16. The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising:

means for receiving a message from one of the first and second partners; and

means for selectively sending the message to the other of the first and second partners based on the terms of a partner agreement, the terms describing the conditions under which messages may be exchanged between the first and second partners.

5 17. The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising:

 means for receiving a message from one of the first and second partners, the message requiring concatenation with a further message to produce the equivalent of a message for the other of the first and second partners;

 means for storing the message until the further message is received;

10 means for concatenating the message and the further message; and

 means for sending the concatenated message to the other of the first and second partners.

15 18. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising:

 means for receiving a message from one of the first and second partners;

 means for translating the message from the protocol of the one of the first and second partners to the protocol of the other of the of the first and second partners based on the assignments between the entries in the first data dictionary and the entries in the second data dictionary; and

20 means for sending the translated message to the other of the first and second partners.

 19. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein means for sending comprises:

 means for selectively sending the message based on the terms of a partner agreement, the terms describing the conditions under which messages may be exchanged between the first and second partners.

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 20. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising:

 means for receiving a message from one of the first and second partners, the message requiring concatenation with a further message to produce the equivalent of a message for the other of the first and second partners;

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 means for storing the message until the further message is received;

means for concatenating the message and the further message; and
means for sending the concatenated message to the other of the first and second
partners.

5 21. A computer-implemented method for facilitating communications among a
group of partners including a first partner having a first communications protocol defining
one or more first messages each including one or more first identifiers, and a second partner
having a second communications protocol defining one or more second messages each
including one or more second identifiers, the first and second protocols being different
10 communications protocols, the method comprising:

 identifying a first data dictionary for the first partner, the first data dictionary
containing one or more entries, each entry including one of the first identifiers and one or
more attributes of the one of the first identifiers;

 15 identifying a second data dictionary for the second partner, the second data dictionary
containing one or more entries, each entry including one of the second identifiers and one or
more attributes of the one of the second identifiers;

 selecting one of the entries in the first data dictionary;
 comparing the selected entry in the first data dictionary to each of the entries in the
second data dictionary;

20 selecting an entry in the second data dictionary based on comparing; and
 assigning the selected entry in the first data dictionary to the selected entry in the
second data dictionary.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein:

25 the communications protocol is an electronic commerce protocol.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein:

 an attribute in each entry describes the relationship between the identifier in the entry
and other identifiers in the data dictionary containing that entry.

30 24. The method of claim 23, wherein:

comparing includes assigning a normalized term to the selected entry in the first data dictionary when no normalized term has been previously assigned to the selected entry in the first data dictionary; and

assigning includes assigning the normalized term to the entry selected in the second data dictionary.

25. The method of claim 24, further comprising:

creating a mapping file describing the assignments between the entries in the first data dictionary and the entries in the second data dictionary; and

sending the mapping file to the first and second partners.

26. The method of claim 25, further comprising:

receiving a message from one of the first and second partners; and

selectively sending the message to the other of the first and second partners based on the terms of a partner agreement, the terms describing the conditions under which messages may be exchanged between the first and second partners.

27. The method of claim 25, further comprising:

receiving a message from one of the first and second partners, the message requiring concatenation with a further message to produce the equivalent of a message for the other of the first and second partners;

storing the message until the further message is received;

concatenating the message and the further message; and

sending the concatenated message to the other of the first and second partners.

28. The method of claim 24, further comprising:

receiving a message from one of the first and second partners;

translating the message from the protocol of the one of the first and second partners to the protocol of the other of the first and second partners based on the assignments between the entries in the first data dictionary and the entries in the second data dictionary; and

sending the translated message to the other of the first and second partners.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein sending comprises:

5 selectively sending the message based on the terms of a partner agreement, the terms describing the conditions under which messages may be exchanged between the first and second partners.

30. The method of claim 24, further comprising:

10 receiving a message from one of the first and second partners, the message requiring concatenation with a further message to produce the equivalent of a message for the other of the first and second partners;

storing the message until the further message is received;

concatenating the message and the further message; and

sending the concatenated message to the other of the first and second partners.